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ABSTRACT

The "Bottled Pain" project, a drug abuse prevention program in 24 Lutheran congregations in southern Minnesota, is based on a social ecology paradigm designed to prevent drug abuse through the development of socially supportive relationshps and through using the environment as a natural strength within the community. According to the social ecology design, the individual and his/her well being are the central focus. The thrust of the program is to encourage individual empowerment through mutual social support (including spending time together, problem solving, physical aid, and emotional support) and interdependency (in behaviors, feelings, values, and resources). Empowerment brings a feeling of surprise in that the individual is helped while helping others. Finally, empowerment renews the individual's spirit and hope through the sharing of mutual resources and settings. Though evaluation of the prevention program also focuses on outcome and impact, process evaluation is of central importance. (BL)

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THE "FLAVOR" OF THE SOCIAL ECOLOGY PARADIGM IN USE: BUILDING ON MUTUAL SOCIAL SUPPORT IN PREVENTING DRUG ABUSE[1]

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Over 10,000 persons have been participating in a drug abuse prevention project in 24 Lutheran congregations in southeastern Minnesota. The program, a three-year program development and evaluation research effort for drug abuse prevention, has been based upon the Social Ecology Paradigm, and been designed to focus on already-existing socially-supportive relationships and the building of new ones (e.g., Roberts & Thorsheim, 1982; Thorsheim and Roberts, 1983). The social ecological approach of the "Bottled Pain" project, funded by a grant from the United States National Institute on Drug Abuse (Department of Health and Human Services), has been to focus on socially supportive relationships among people--their families, other relatives and friends--and their environment as natural strengths within a community.

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Fig. 1. Social Ecology Research Logo

In our project's logo (See Fig. 1) we have the individual focus in the center, with the "sense of well-being" a thrust of

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our work. We recognize that this "psychological sense of well-being" (e.g., Kellam, 1977) is very much related to a "sense of not being alone", or to say it another way, a sense of belonging to a larger system, a "psychological sense of community" (e.g., Sarason, 1974). That "larger system" is a source of mutual social support which is experienced in many ways.

The social ecological approach is contextual; that is, it includes a recognition that each congregation is different in many ways. Each has its own history, its own environment, and its own resources. The design of an effective program must be based on consideration of the specific context of each congregation. If we have 24 congregations (or "n" of them), we will have that many variations on the theme of prevention.

THE "PACE" OF SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL WORK

Rather than a quick "oneshot", "in-and-out" approach to community work, the social ecological approach is better described by words like "paced", "thoughtful", "wholistic" and "non-frenetic".

The thrust of the approach is to help encourage the development of what is called "empowerment" (e.g., Rappaport, 1981), which includes the restoration and creation of hope. This kind of "hope" is characterized by a community attitude that "we can do it together", and a confidence that the necessary resources for continuing development exist and can be accessed from within the community system.

The hope which we speak of is quite different from a "hope" which is a "wish" or "desire for something to happen from the outside", while the person hoping waits in a passive manner.

Rather, the "hope" of the social ecology perspective is that it is a view of the individual as a changing and developing being. The hopefulness of the social ecology perspective is this alliance with change in the process of living.

The Social Ecology Paradigm includes the study, encouragement of, and participation in mutual, interactive and interdependent processes. A paradigm example of such a process is "mutual social support".

MUTUAL SOCIAL SUPPORT

Social support describes a set of behaviors, attitudes, and information about the value of such support. The term "mutual social support" immediately, in addition, suggests "us" - - you and me. In "mutual social support" we find new resources in one another and in ourselves. Thus, we become "empowered" individually, as well as "empowered" as a partnership. The consequence of this empowerment is that we are empowered to participate actively in our environments to affect change.

The following factors, the development of which have been guided in part by the extensive work of Gottlieb (e.g., 1976; 1981), seem to be helpful in understanding the ingredients of mutual social support:

1. SPENDING TIME TOGETHER. Barrera and Ainley (1983) refer to it as positive social interaction. It includes such things as talking, joking, and doing an activity together.

2. COGNITIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING HELP. This is similar to the "Directive Guidance" Factor from Barrera and Ainley (1983), and part of the "Aid" Factor from Antonucci and Depner (1982). It includes such things as giving information, suggesting action, checking back, teaching and resource assistance.

3. MATERIAL AND/OR DIRECT PHYSICAL AID. This is the "Tangible Assistance" Factor from Barrera and Ainley (1983). It includes giving or loaning money or other physical items, pitching in to help, advocacy, providing transportation, and looking after a family member.

4. EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND AFFIRMATION. This is referred to as "Non-directive Support" by Barrera and Ainley (1983), but seems helpfully divided into several categories suggested by Antonucci and Depner (1982):

a. EMOTIONAL SUPPORT, or affect, which includes feeling loved and cared for, and unconditional access and availability to a friend or family member.

b. ESTEEM SUPPORT which contributes to a sense of personal worth and self esteem.

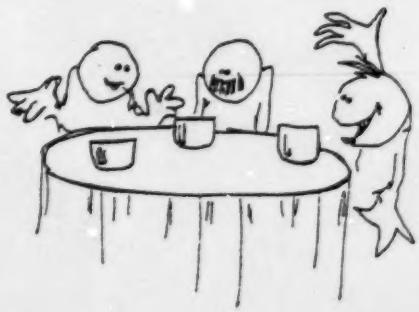
c. CLARIFICATION AND AFFIRMATION that you can interpret events correctly and are "okay".

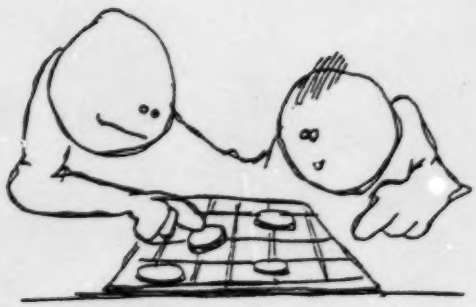
d. RECIPROCITY, or a sense of mutual interaction. This category does not seem to be spoken to directly in the Barrera scale.

Our understanding of "mutual social support" is that a key part of that notion involves a mutuality between persons rather than a single-directioned notion which says, "I will help you because I am strong and you are weak" . When we think about mutual social support, we might be tempted to think of that as meaning a kind of complementary relationship. In a sense that's true, but a danger of that understanding of the word is that it can be interpreted to mean that "I have need to help people, and you have need to be helped, and so that is how we complement each other". That would be a description of dependency, rather than <u>interdependency</u>. Mutal social support involves behaviors, feelings, and beliefs or values that stress <u>interdependent</u> relationships. It is the interdependent nature of socially supportive relationships that facilitates discovering a sense of mutual and individual empowerment.

A. <u>Behaviors</u>: "What is 'mutual social support', anyway?" The following cartoons illustrate that mutal social support describes a range of behaviors. What needs to be stressed is that the support takes place <u>mutually</u>. That is, it's not a single-directioned kind of behavior which always is initiated by one person and received by another person - - it goes both ways.

It is "mutual".





[Incidentally, we have found cartoons such as these to be very helpful in our social ecology work because they

1. Break the text into conceptual "chunks"
2. Provide visual mnemonics for remembering the content
3. "Soften" the boundaries of the information, making is "user friendly".]

B. <u>Feelings</u>: When implementing the Social Ecology Paradigm, it may not be apparent initially that we also are going to be on the receiving end of the flow of support. For example, as we enter a mutual-support relationship to give an elderly person a ride, or to bring over a hot dish, it may come as a surprise to

discover that we are in fact receiving as we are giving, and that the person we initially think of as "in need" is a source of strength and support in surprising ways for us. It is impossible to predict as a certainty this reciprocal support that occurs as we help others. Perhaps what is most important to say is that it can happen. An important part of "mutual social support" is to look forward to it, to know it is available and to feel that it is important.

In mutual social support there is an acknowledgement by both of the mutual state of the relationship. There is an offering here of a piece of each person's "history", time and help to the other. For example, our friend J.L. said,

"...when we do share ourselves--our innermost selves with somebody else... and they with us, there's a communication there that's almost indescribable. We become a part of each other."

C. Beliefs and Values: The values embedded in interdependent mutual associations of people are a part of our roots. For example, in the early history of our own country, the Homesteading Act provided land for pioneers if they would promise to stay on the land for five years and to develop it. The mutual relationship here was that the government provided the land and the pioneers provided the labor to develop the land. As a result, the country grew, individuals grew, and both sides of the mutual arrangement gained.

Partnerships of all kinds illustrate mutual relationships. The relationship between a community and a professional working in the community, researchers and their subjects, - - each being

a partner with the other - - are other good examples (e.g., Sanford, 1982; Tyler, Pargament, and Gatz, 1983). Helpful and hopeful examples of mutual partnerships exist in many sectors of our society. Another example is in the relationship between people who work together toward common goals in order to provide resources for themselves as well as for those that they are serving.

An important part of the beliefs and values associated with "mutual support" is a belief in - - and a valuing of - - change and renewal, and a belief that one can participate in an active and effective way in this world to help one another.

Mutual support can come from many persons; for example, in work situations, in interactions with shopkeepers, with children in the neighborhood, and with retired adults. One person told us recently, "My 'significant other' is many people". She was referring to a diverse network of friends of all ages in many different settings with whom she found mutual support to exist. She needed them and they needed her just as surely as she provided support for them and they for her.

D. <u>Discovering Diverse Existing Resources</u>: Mutual relationships are enhanced when each partner brings diversity to the relationship. Differences are resources in this case. It is not simply a case of equivalence, because each side of the mutual partnership contributes something different. Both provide something new in the new growth. Diverse resources and strengths which can help ease pains and resolve problems are <u>discovered</u> within mutual relationships. These resources, these strengths,

have always been a part of us, or our family or community, but they are discovered, nurtured, and grow in the mutually supportive milieu.

E. Developing a Sense of Empowerment: In mutual social support there is a feeling of "empowerment" which is the creation of new energy. Buckminster Fuller (1975, p. 5) spoke of "synergy" as "the eternally regenerative integrity of the universe." This must include the energy which is generated by working together. When mutual support is taking place there is a feeling of this empowerment or synergy. We find new resources of energy and commitment in one another and in ourselves.

One might think initially that the ideas of empowerment mean the same as what some have called "control". One might conclude that the "empowered" person is one who can really control one's self, others, and the environment. However, the theme which seems to run through "stories" of "empowerment" which we have heard persons tell one another in our work is a kind of offering of one's self and one's experiences to others, without attempting to "control" what they do, how they feel, or what they believe.

"Empowerment" is different from "power". In fact, the "empowered persons" talk about becoming "less controlling", "less categorical", "and "less judgemental". Empowerment does mean "investing yourself" or becoming personally involved. Empowerment involves a sense of trust in others, together with a belief in one's self enough to take risks such as the telling others about one's history - - including both pain and joy-filled times.

Self interest or "interest in self" may provide a reason for a person to become immediately interested in whatever is going on. It gives an opening for a person to begin to think about mutual support because of the fact that this provides another opportunity for meeting one's self interest. The fact that at the same time one is meeting the needs of another may be a surprise.

Such surprise may occur two ways:

1. A person initially may begin to be involved in "mutual support" in order to receive help oneself, and be surprised to learn that what one has or who one is is also a resource for another.

2. A second way the surprise can occur would be for a person to become engaged in supporting others in what is thought to be an altruistic fashion, and then be surprised to learn that one is being helped oneself.

The first kind of surprise would seem to be the surprise experienced by a person who is feeling "down", and then is surprised to learn that one <u>nevertheless</u> has something to offer to others.

The second kind of surprise seems to be the kind which would be experienced by someone who initially thinks he or she has "everything altogether", and then is surprised to learn that one has needs.

In the introductory chapter for their book Support Systems and Mutual Help Caplan and Killiea (1976, p. 16) highlight the importance of "empowering" existing networks through the stimulation of supportive relationships:

> "one of the most important messages is that successful intervention cannot be crystallized and transferred as a stereotyped package from one situation to another. It must be...sensitively tailored to the local situation, and energized by personal relationships...."

EVALUATION RESEARCH AND THE SOCIAL ECOLOGY PARADIGM

In our several years' experience in drug abuse prevention work, we have grown in our appreciation for the work which professionals and organizations in treatment and aftercare are doing. What we call the "Partnership Approach" is one which involves a commitment to work together with these persons in programs and evaluation research. In addition, the mutually-supportive potential of prevention, intervention and treatment is very important to point out to the community members with whom one works. The "Partnership Approach" complements aleady-existing and successful approaches in secondary and tertiary treatment.

To evaluate applications of the social ecology paradigm, three components of evaluation must be addressed: outcome evaluation, impact evaluation, and process evaluation (See French and Kaufman, 1980 for an excellent summary of these components).

A. Outcomes in terms of information, attitudes, and behavior changes among the group of persons in the community one is working with most directly.

B. Impacts or influences on systems beyond the boundaries of the group of persons one is working with most directly (i.e., spread of effect into the larger embedding community, both in terms of immediate and future effects.

C. Process of the project's development (i.e., the extent to which the social ecology paradigm was actually followed).

The last point of "process" deserves special emphasis. It includes the extent to which:

1. Rapport with the test population was established and developed.

2. Resources were identified and developed in the setting in which the research is being conducted, and toward which the research effort is directed.

3. Objectives were encouraged which enhanced mutual social support in order to:

a. link together people who have something in common,

b. help naturally-occurring groups increase levels of social support by encouraging mutual help around those common concerns,

c. encourage the development of leader/coordinators from the group to help "pass the candlelight along to others", as someone called it,

d. identify the leader/coordinators who can facilitate resource exchange networks where "rescurce" includes strengths, skills, and experiences,

e. develop new activities and programs to provide occasions and settings which bring people together,

f. stimulate awareness and knowledge about available information, assistance, and appropriate occasions for the use of professionals,

g. encourage people to redefine themselves as resources in mutually interdependent ways.

The emphasis on "process" has been stimulated in our work by the thoughts of Kelly's Division 27 Presidential Address (Kelly, 1978). The title of that presentation, "T'Ain't What You Do, It's The Way That You Do It", has been a refrain which has both intrigued us and shown itself to be a key guide in the social ecological paradigm. It's the <u>process</u> that is important. The process provides entree and credibility. It acknowledges the community member as the real expert who knows his/her communities history, hopes, fears, and networks of human relationships--all of which are resources or can be converted into resources.

Of utmost importance is the extent to which all members of the community are involved who conceivably might be interested in the prevention work. Reasons for this include the sense of community ownership over what is done, and assurance of openness in what transpires. This also lets the community get to know the professionals who are serving as catalysts, and leads the people in the community to understand and recognize the fact that they are in fact essential to the success of whatever is done because of their understanding of their own community.

A successful community involvement in the "Partnership Approach" of social ecology is signified by the community itself becoming empowered, self-organizing, and self-generating. The social ecologist has been successful when that happens.

SETTINGS, STORYTELLING, AND MUTUAL RESOURCES

One of our friends recently commented to us that:

"The human is not only a participant in the world, but also an arena in which the world is represented and hence operates" (Faillettaz, 1983).

Settings provide a place where people gather together to "participate in the world", and settings provide an opportunity for the world to be "represented" in people. In a setting, people have the opportunity to share their experiences. We sometimes refer to this sharing of experiences as "telling our stories". When we tell our stories, we risk ourselves by sharing with others something about ourselves, our history, experiences,

concerns, feeling and ideas. Our hesitation in telling our stories rests on the questions, will they listen? Will they like what I have to say? Will they accept me if they know more about me?

The possible gains from telling one's story include the acceptance of our stories (and thus of us) by the listener, and learning that we are not alone because the listener may tell us that he or she has had similar experiences. This process and feelings of acceptance can lead to feelings of "okayness" about who we are. In addition, within the storytelling process there is the opportunity to learn something about other resources for help to assist us.

As we tell our stories, we may be surprised that our telling of our pain or suffering can be a resource to others. Our sense of understanding of others as a result of experiences is one form of support, a resource for others, in the same way that they are for us, as they listen to our stories. Such mutual feelings of "okayness", and of being understood, can lead to a release of energy for all persons in such settings. Whereas before that energy was tied up incapsulating the individual pains we felt inside , now it can be the wellspring of hope.

Such a new discovery of energy as a result of the mutual resources made available by sharing stories with others can help us see that there are more things that we can do together, think about, and expect to occur, than perhaps we had ever hoped. Thus we are increased in our "hope". This hope includes a willingness to risk. The empowerment that comes from this increased hope,

energy, and commitment helps us to anticipate future gains and helps us to repeat the cycle in that setting, and in other settings. The empowerment includes a kind of "new view" of who each of us is individually, and also who we are together.

CONCLUSION

Empowerment is contextual and includes a recognition of resources that have always been there, but which now have increased in their accessibility. Furthermore, empowered persons are not limited to simply choosing among already existing alternatives, but are able to create new alternatives from resources which are already available. Empowerment describes that "something" that happens to people when resources exist and can be accessed. It is the renewing of spirit, and hope, and an orientation toward being willing to take risks. Applications of the Social Ecology Paradigm contribute to thinking, feeling, and behaving in ways that amplify possibilities for hopeful alternative futures.

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